

## GREEK CAMPAIGN

### OPERATION DEMON

#### Royal Navy and Mercantile Marine

#### White Ensign, Blue Ensign & Red Ensign - Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy, British & Dutch Merchant Navies

## SUMMARY OF EVENTS

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following summary, in the nature of a Royal Navy overall appraisal of the evacuation from Greece, has survived along with copies of the foregoing records but carries neither signature nor identity of the originator. Nevertheless, it forms a most valuable record of how 'OPERATION DEMON' was perceived and assessed by the Royal Navy at the time).

(1) To appreciate the difficulties involved in the evacuation of the Imperial Forces from Greece, and the degree of success which was finally obtained by ships of the ROYAL and MERCHANT NAVIES, it is essential to realize that no air protection whatsoever was available to counter the repeated and concentrated attacks of hostile aircraft.

It was, therefore, only practicable for evacuation to take place at night, and the period even then had to be limited in order that ships should as far as possible, be out of range of dive bombers by daylight. This generally meant that embarkation had to cease not later than 0300.

(2) All the light naval forces available were employed on the operation, and these included 6 cruisers, 19 destroyers, 3 escort vessels, 3 corvettes and 6 'A' lighters. The 3 GLEN with their specially equipped landing craft proved invaluable and 8 transports were employed to tie off the coast at different

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points, where destroyers and other craft ferried troops to them from the shore.

(3) For different reasons, events ashore moved with unexpected swiftness communications inevitably became chaotic and in many cases broke down. Intelligence therefore could only be approximate. Hence, there is every reason to regard the evacuation of over 50,000 officers and men (out of a total of 55,000 whom it had hoped to rescue) as a great achievement.

(4) Right from the GULF of PATALI, due east of ATHENS, down the east coasts and from points on the SOUTH of MOREA, parties of troops were brought off during 5 successive nights, and from the shores of the GULF of KALAMATA, which is contained by the sweep of the coast to the N and W of CAPE MATAPAN, some of the most thrilling rescues took place.

(5) On the night of 26th/27 April 1941 (SAT/SUN), it was learnt that there were more than 8,000 men to be embarked from KALAMATA itself, the small port at the head of the GULF. Up to that moment no German land forces had crossed the CORINTH CANAL, so there was no reason to suppose that any difficulty would attend the actual embarkation. Accordingly, a force of PHOEBE, the destroyers HERO, HEReward and DEFENDER, the FLAMINGO and the transports DILWARA, CITY OF LONDON and COSTA RICA arrived off KALAMATA about 2200 (26th SAT).

(6) There was nobody there! Although troops were in the neighbourhood, they had not received information that the NAVY would be coming in for them that night due to communications having broken down. Thus precious minutes were wasted while contact was made with the military authorities. Then things moved swiftly. Berthing two at a time, the 3 destroyers carrying 1200 or more each trip, ferried 8650 troops to the waiting transports. If it had not been for the official delay they might have collected another 3000, but they had already remained for longer than was wise and it was

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after 0400 when the convoy finally sailed.

(7) From 0800 onwards, the day was full of excitement as one attack after another developed from the air. First, ships were subjected to high level bombing, during the course of which one soldier in DEFENDER was killed by a splinter, but no damage was caused and one A/C was shot down. 20 minutes later 18 JUNKERS-87s dived out of the sun, but encountered such heavy fire that their bombs missed. 1 A/C was destroyed and one other seriously damaged.

(8) The JUNKERS-87s were followed at intervals by 2 more high level attacks and at 1215, 12 JUNKERS-88s made a second attempt at dive bombing followed by another wave of 88s an hour later. Although there were several near misses, intense AA fire put the bombers off their aim and no was inflicted on any ship.

(9) At 1445 the 7th and last attack was delivered, again by JUNKERS-88s diving from the direction of the sun. In spite of sustained opposition from the ships guns, a near miss damaged COSTA RICA who had on board some 2400 troops. She immediately stopped, took on an alarming list and reported that her engine room was flooded and that the boiler room was rapidly filling up.

(10) DEFENDER immediately went alongside, followed in turn by HEReward and HERO, although COSTA RICA gave every indication that she would roll on top of them at any moment. Together they embarked everyone onboard, while on her other side where the swell precluded a destroyer from berthing, the transport lowered boats and rafts in which a few soldiers pulled away. Except for one man who dived overboard and cracked his skull on a raft, every single man was saved; a tribute not only to the skilful and courageous handling of the destroyers but also to the discipline of the troops, who fell in on the upper deck and quietly waited their turn to disembark to the rescue craft.

(11) On the off chance of being able to salvage COSTA RICA at dusk, HERO remained in the vicinity while the rest of the

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convoy proceeded. But within a short time the damaged vessel rolled over and sank and HERO rejoined the other ships all of whom reached SUDA BAY in safety without further opposition.

(12) At dawn on the 27th (SUN), a strong force of German parachute troops suddenly descended near the CORINTH CANAL and captured the vital bridge connecting MOREA to CENTRAL Greece. This had an important and unfortunate effect on the evacuation, as it brought the enemy down to the beaches long before they were expected, disrupted communications and introduced chaos and uncertainty. It was impossible to know where the Germans might appear and boats proceeding to the shore under cover of darkness were as likely as not to find enemy as friend.

(13) On the night of 28/29 (MON/TUES) believing that KALAMATA was still in Allied occupation, a force of cruisers and destroyers was directed towards the GULF in order to complete the evacuation. As wireless communication had been unsatisfactory, HERO was sent on ahead to make the necessary preparations. But that day disturbing events had been taking place in and around KALAMATA. As waiting troops lay hidden in the olive groves and in the light cover on the slopes behind the town, wave after wave of hostile A/C bombed and machine gunned them mercilessly, attacked the shipping in the harbour, dropped mines off the entrance, smashed up the quays and did considerable damage to the town.

(14) Then, in the early afternoon, there fell an ominous silence. As a small party of Hussars was meditating whether they should emerge from the wood in which they had taken cover and make their way towards the sea, they suddenly heard the noise of engines coming down the road. A sergeant, sensing the pleasant prospect of a lift, stepped out and held up his hand to stop an armoured car that had just turned the corner. To his horror he was greeted by a burst of fire. An enemy motorised column was approaching the town. Diving rapidly

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into the woods again, the sergeant and his companions made a difficult dash across marshy country to the beach eastward of KALAMATA, where they were fortunate enough to find a boat in which they put to sea and after various hardships and adventures were picked up by HMS ISIS two nights later.

(15) meanwhile, the German column swept into town taking everyone by surprise. They burst into the offices of the Naval Captain who had arrived as Sea Transport Officer, captured him, his staff and the embarkation officers, and hurrying them into a car sent them inland.

(16) On the beaches and in the neighbourhood fifth column activities spread rumour and alarms. Germans were reported everywhere, their numbers grossly exaggerated and the general situation was so conflicting that clashes frequently occurred between parties of our troops, who consisted of details belonging to many different units.

(17) At length about 2100 a LT. COL of the RASC decided that the strength of the German force was much weaker than was previously conjectured. Actually they were only 300 with 2 60-PDR guns. Collecting parties of Australian and New Zealand troops and some RASC details, he organised a counter-attack, and drove the enemy out of the town, taking over 100 prisoners and putting one of their guns and an armoured car out of action.

(18) At this moment HERO was approaching the port. From ten miles off big fires had been observed raging in the centre of the town and as she closed, tracer bullets in profusion indicated that heavy fighting was in progress. Suddenly, from a position to the east, an Army signaller began to flash 'BOSCHE IN HARBOUR'. After passing the message to the approaching cruisers, HERO proceeded to investigate and, steaming close inshore, landed the 1st-LIEUT. to try and contact the Army to the south east of the port. As the situation was so confused and firing frequently broke out from positions thought to be friendly, this officer was as likely as not to find himself landing on a beach held in strength by the

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enemy. But he persevered, found the Brigadier and immediately began to arrange for a beach evacuation to take place.

(19) Because of the mines off the harbour entrance, numerous sunken caiques and the damaged quays, it was considered quite impracticable to embark troops from the harbour, even when the Germans had been driven from the town, and for this and no other reasons, the cruisers did not approach. Previous embarkation arrangements had been thrown into complete disorder by the capture of the NSTO and his staff.

(20) Soon after midnight, however, KANDAHAR, KINGSTON and KIMBERLEY joined HERO and, with their own boats, the 4 destroyers embarked as many troops from the beach as time and their transport permitted. The numbers rescued were pitifully small in comparison to those it had been hoped to bring off, but the 3400 that did actually embark represented the utmost effort on the part of the destroyers under most difficult and unexpected circumstances.

(21) At dawn the next day the Germans arrived in force, and the Brigadier believed that he had no alternative but to surrender. To expose the troops to another day of intense bombing, surrounded by superior forces and with no ammunition or food, invited annihilation. Small parties, nevertheless, refused to heed the order to lay down their arms and made off down the coast. Some found boats in which to put to sea by night and laid up during the day, others assembled on beaches north of CAPE MATAPAN: all experienced alarming adventures and endured considerable hardship, but their firm conviction that the NAVY would not let them down provided them with the urge to keep on going. Their trust was justified for, on the two succeeding nights, destroyers swept the waters where they were likely to be found, picked up many caiques full of escaping soldiers and preceded to lonely beaches where small parties had gathered in the blind faith that they would be rescued.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Survival of these detailed Royal Navy

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accounts over a period of fifty years - in the precise form in which they were written - is justification enough for our omitting nothing. Often the same incident may have been separately described by several individuals, each with their own way of telling it the way it was, as perceived through one pair of eyes. Matching accounts justifiably strengthen the evidence).

### OPERATION 'DEMON' HM SHIPS TAKING PART

#### CRUISERS

Ajax, Auckland (Sloop), Calcutta, Carlisle, Coventry,  
Orion, Perth, Phoebe

#### DESTROYERS

Decoy, Defender, Diamond, Griffin, Hasty, Havock, Hero,  
Hereward, Hotspur, Isis, Kandahar, Kimberley, Kingston,  
Nubian, Stuart, Vendetta, Voyager, Waterhen, Wryneck

#### CORVETTES

Flamingo, Hyacinth, Salvia

#### GLEN SHIPS

Glenearn, Glengyle, Glenroy, Ulster Prince (Assault Ship)

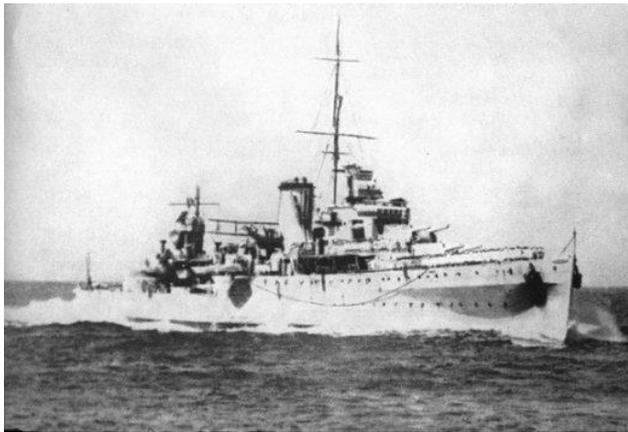
#### 'A' LIGHTERS

A.1, A.5, A.6, A.15, A.19

#### MERCHANT SHIPS

City of London, Costa Rica, Dilwara, Khedive Ismail,  
Pennland, Salween, Slamati, Thurland Castle

**Cruisers**



**HMS Ajax: Pre-War (carrying catapult biplane)**



**In camouflage**



**HMAS Auckland**



**HMS Calcutta**



**HMS Carlisle**



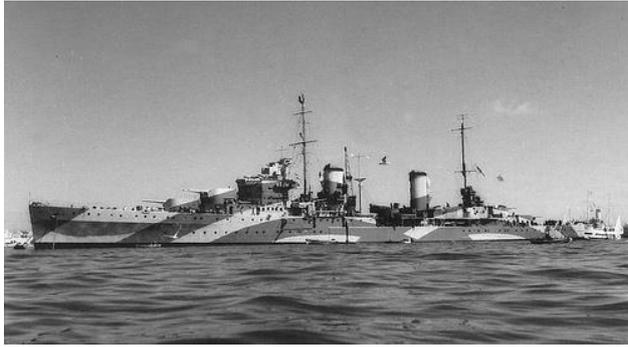
**HMS Coventry**



**HMS Orion: Pre-War (carrying catapult biplane)**



**In camouflage (see also Nat Petrie archive)**



**HMAS Perth: Alexandria, May 1941**



**HMS Pheobe: Valetta pre-war**

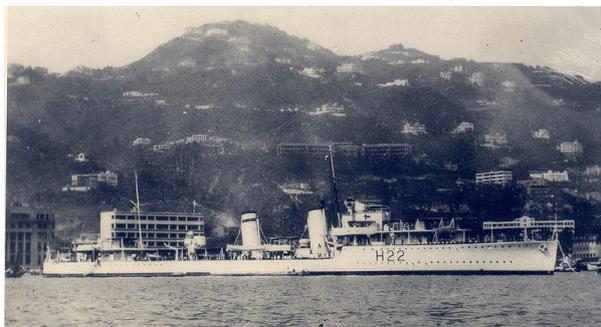
**Destroyers**



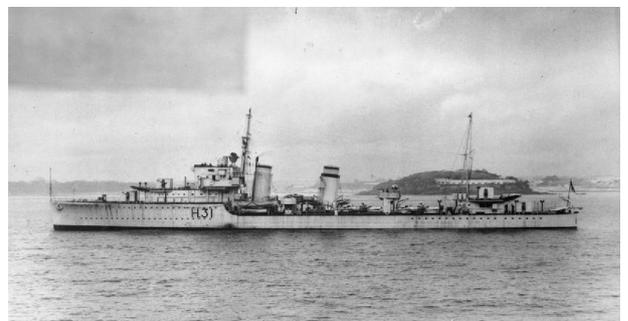
**HMS Decoy**



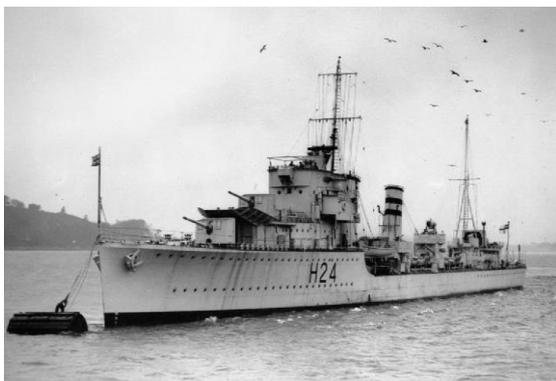
**HMS Defender**



**HMS Diamond - sunk 27 April 1941  
(see also Frank Moss archive)**



**HMS Griffin**



**HMS Hasty**



**HMS Havock**



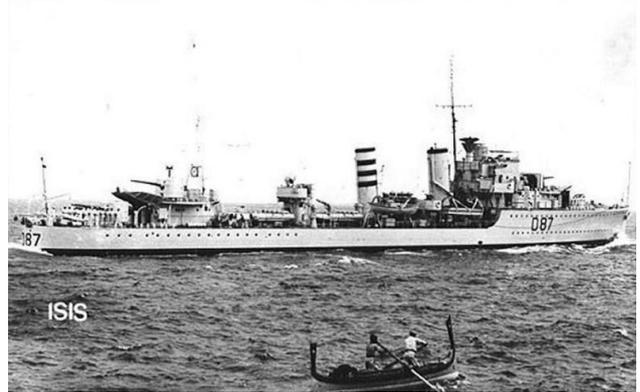
**HMS Hereward**



**HMS Hero (see also Sharkey Ward archive)**



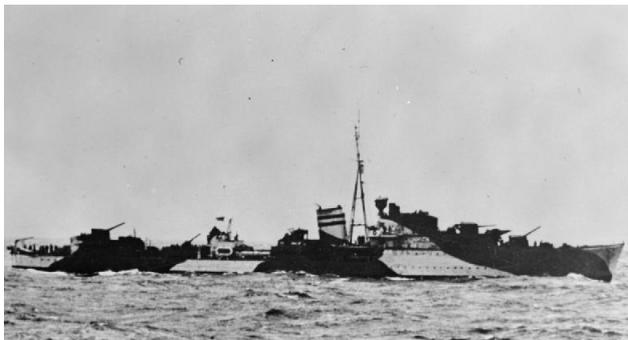
**HMS Hotspur**



**HMS Isis**



**HMS Kandahar towing captured Italian submarine prize**



**HMS Kimberely**



**HMS Kingston**



**HMS Nubian**



**HMAS Stuart**



**HMAS Vendetta . . .**



**. . . with evacuated troops on board**



**HMS Voyager . . .**



**. . . at Suda Bay, April/May 1941**



**HMAS Waterhen**



**HMAS Wryneck (sunk - see George Dexter archive)**

**Corvettes (no picture of HMS Hyacinth available)**



**HMS Flamingo**



**HMS Salvia**

**Glen Ships (LSI = Landing Ship Infantry; LSA = Landing Ship Assault)**



**MV Glenearn, 1938**



**HMT Glenearn under tow, Suez**



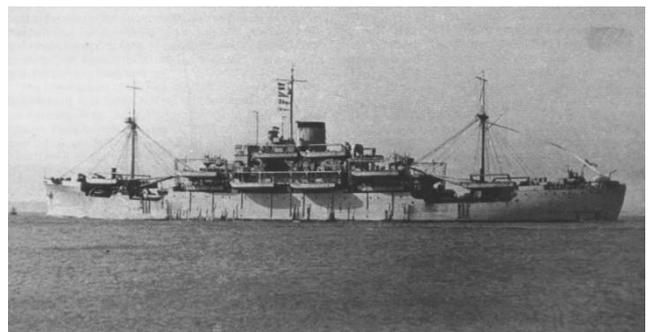
**HMT Glengyle**



**HMT Glengyle, LSI**



**MV Glenroy**



**HMT Glenroy, LSI**

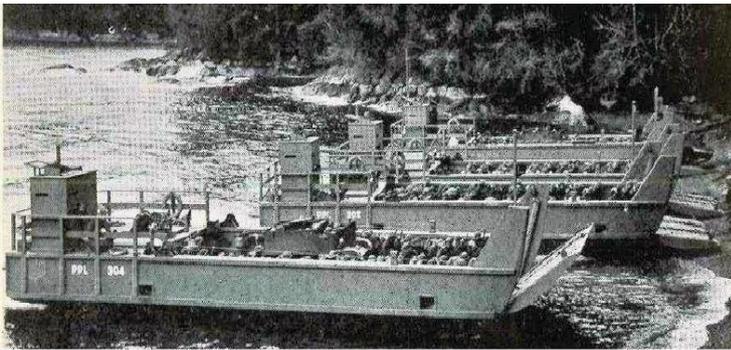


**MV Ulster Prince (see also Gerry Hughes archive)**



**HMT Ulster Prince, LSA**

**'A' Class Lighters (LCA = Landing Craft Assault)**

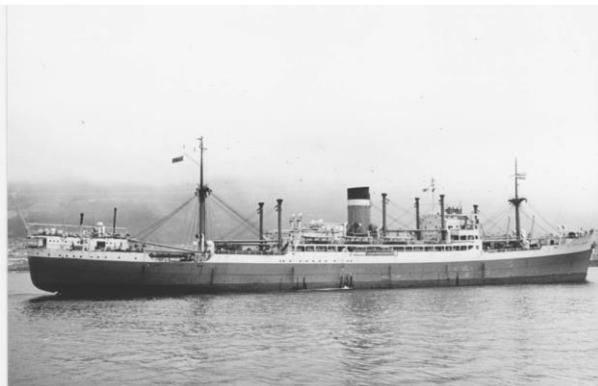


**Landing Craft Lighter 1943**



**Landing Craft Lighter 1944**

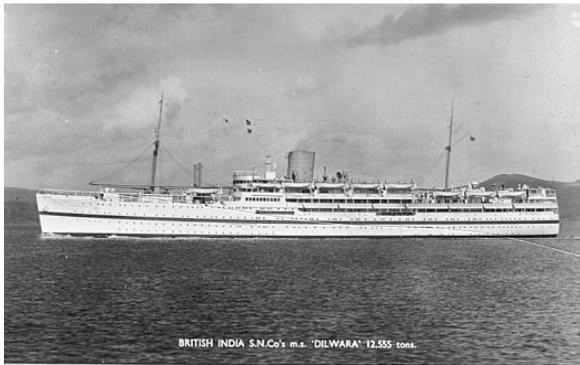
**Merchant Ships**



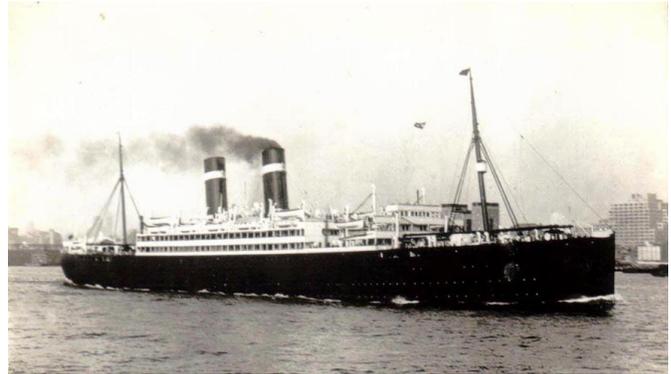
**MV City of London**



**SS Costa Rica (Dutch - sunk during evacuation, 27 April 1941)**



MV Dilwara



SS Pennland (Dutch - sunk 24/25 April en route to evacuation off Megara)

News of ship's sinking by Japanese submarine was suppressed

# Fate of Wrens revealed after 50 years

By JOHN YOUNG

A CARVED paschal candle will be blessed in the church of St Mary-le-Strand, London, tomorrow in memory of 20 members of the Women's Royal Naval Service who were killed in action 50 years ago. They were among the victims of one of the worst maritime disasters of the Second World War, news of which was deliberately suppressed.

In the early afternoon of February 12, 1944, the *Khedive Ismail*, in convoy en route from Mombasa to Colombo, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine in the Indian Ocean. Blown apart by an explosion in the boiler room, she sank within two minutes with the loss of 1,297 lives.

In terms of fatalities it was comparable with the sinking of the Cunard White Star liner *Lancastria* off St Nazaire, France, in June 1940 and the destruction of the battle cruiser *HMS Hood* by the *Bismarck* in May 1941. While those sinkings were reported at the time, it has taken half a century for the fate of the *Khedive Ismail* to be revealed.

According to Lionel Hooke, a former Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Naval Reserve who tells the story in a book to be published soon, information was not released by the Public Record Office until 1985, more than ten years beyond the usual 30 years stipulated for matters considered to affect national security. The defence ministry said yesterday that the 30-year rule was sometimes extended in particularly sensitive cases.

Tom Fox, a survivor who was then an 18-year-old Royal Navy signaller, believes it was because the commander of one of two British destroyers escorting the convoy took the decision to depth-charge the submarine while survivors were in the water.

"I did not realise it at the time but in retrospect I think that is what happened," he said. "My mother was advised that I had been lost at sea. When the time came for me to be demobbed, I discovered that I had been officially dead for several months."

On board the *Khedive Ismail* were more than 700 African soldiers with British officers and senior NCOs, 200 Royal Navy personnel, 40 army nurses and 22 Wren signallers. The vessel was steaming at about 13 knots when a Japanese submarine surfaced in the middle of the convoy and fired two torpedoes into the boiler room. She was on her beam ends in 45 seconds and sank a minute later.

The destroyer *HMS Paladin* was able to pick up 260 survivors while *HMS Petard* forced the submarine to resurface. Neither destroyer was equipped with armour-piercing shells and they dispatched the submarine with torpedoes.

The submarine was one of the remarkable IJN class, which had a range of 14,000 miles and could travel between Malaya and the coast of France without refuelling.

The ill-fated *Khedive Ismail* was sunk when a Japanese submarine surfaced among a convoy and fired two torpedoes at point-blank range

A Japanese IJN class submarine, sister vessel to the one that sank the *Khedive Ismail*

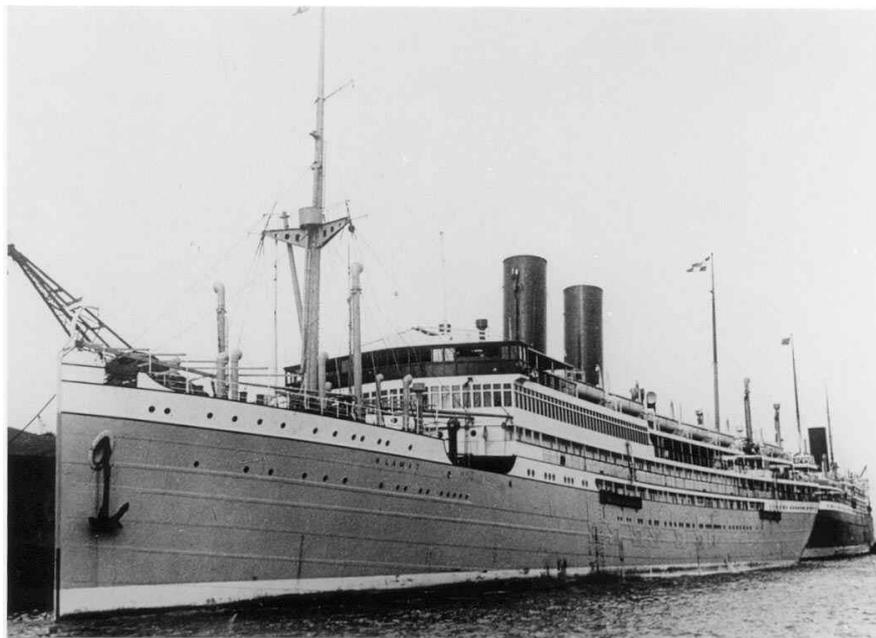
SS Khedive Ismail (torpedoed 1944)



**SS Salween**



**MV Thurland Castle**



**SS Slammat (Dutch - sunk in evacuation, 27 April 1941)**

### **The Loss of the 'Slamat' and her Escorts**

From *The London Gazette*, 19 May 1948:

*"Because of the presence in Greece of strong enemy air forces and the rapidly diminishing fighter support, it was necessary to carry out all evacuation at night and withdraw all ships to the southward during the day. The whole programme was based on this consideration. It will be noticed that nearly all losses from aircraft were sustained the region of the parallel of 37 degrees North, which was approximately the limit of the range of the enemy dive bombers.*

*It was my policy to insist on all ships leaving the places of embarkation in time to be south of 37 degrees North by daylight and it will be noted that the failure of the SLAMAT to leave Nauplia at the time ordered resulted in her being within range of the dive bombers well after dawn. . . .*

*. . . . Throughout there was no fighter support for ships at sea north of 37 degrees North. The R.A.F. in Crete did what they could for convoys south of this latitude, but the protection was slender, by reason of the small number of aircraft available."*

**H. D. PRIDHAM-WIPPELL,**  
*Vice Admiral*

Ignoring orders, Slammat had delayed her departure from Nauplia from 0300 to 0415 in order to embark as many evacuees as possible. A desperately sad and ironic mis-guided decision, as it turned out.

Here follows an extract from "Greek Tragedy '41" by Lieutenant Heckstall-Smith RN and Vice Admiral Baillie-Grohman RN, OiC of Operation Demon. It is their Chapter titled 'The Sinking of the Slammat'.

*"When dawn broke on Sunday, 27th April, the transports SLAMAT and KHEDIVE ISMAIL with their escorts CALCUTTA, ISIS, HOTSPUR and DIAMOND, were steaming down the Gulf of Nauplia (Archivist's note: i.e. away from the port of Nauplia where they had evacuated troops the previous night). They were still many miles the wrong side of latitude 37 degrees North. Indeed, they were so far north of that position that for the first hours of daylight, they continued on their way without sighting the dawn patrol of Stukas which was searching for them a good deal further to the south.*

*It was about seven o'clock when the lookouts on CALCUTTA's bridge sighted enemy planes, and her alarm bells sounded 'Action Stations'. Captain Lees immediately altered course to take station between the two transports so as to give them the maximum protection. DIAMOND, ISIS and HOTSPUR increased to full speed and dashed ahead to throw up a barrage in front of the Stukas as they came diving in.*

*Since SLAMAT was the largest ship, she became the attackers first target. Again and again, the Stukas went for her. And again and again, the barrage from the escorts threw the bombers off their aim.*

*CALCUTTA was surrounded by near-misses and lurched and rocked to the repercussion of the bombs exploding round her. Lying between the two merchantmen, she was a floating anti-aircraft battery. Her duty was to protect her charges at no matter what risk to herself. She was a proud ship with a fine record and before the war had been commanded by Cunningham when she was flagship of the West Indies Station. And since she had come to the Mediterranean in September 1940, she had taken part in a score of battles with the Luftwaffe while protecting convoys to Malta and along the North African coast, so that her gunners were experts.*

*But that morning with the sky filled with weaving Stukas and Me.110s and I09s screaming in from all points of the compass, CALCUTTA's gunners, standing up against a hail of machine-gun and cannon fire, could not hope to drive off the enemy.*

*Ten minutes after the attack started, two bombs struck the SLAMAT, one after the other. A great sheet of flame shot skywards from forward of her bridge, to be followed seconds later by a pillar of black smoke and flying chunks of metal and wood.*

*With no one left alive on her bridge or in her wheelhouse, the SLAMAT went out of control. Missing the CALCUTTA by feet only, she sheered wildly into the wind so that the fires burning on her fore deck, rushing aft, enveloped her in flames from stem to stern. The flames burned through the falls of her lifeboats so that they crashed into the water. A few boats were lowered, some empty, others filled with soldiers. Over her sides, the Australians jumped into the water, many with their clothes alight. The SLAMAT was finished.*

*HOTSPUR was wing ship to port of the convoy, but since DIAMOND had spent so little time in the harbour at Nauplia the night before, she was nearly empty, and Lees ordered her back to rescue the survivors from SLAMAT.*

*The main force of bombers now turned their attention to the KHEDIVE ISMAIL, while a few continued to go for the SLAMAT, diving down to spray her blazing decks with their cannons and machine-guns.*

*Then, from out of the west the Ju.88s arrived to take over from the Stukas, and began a low-level attack on the KHEDIVE ISMAIL and the CALCUTTA. But although the water around them became a boiling cauldron of exploding bombs, the two ships steamed through it unharmed.*

*It was just after nine o'clock when the last Ju.88 had unloaded its bombs that the crews of the CALCUTTA, ISIS and HOTSPUR saw three destroyers closing them at full speed from the south. They were WRYNECK, VENDETTA and WATERHEN, veterans of the V and W Class and a part of the Royal Australian Navy's Flotilla whose Captain 'D' was Waller of the STUART. And at Pridham-Wippell's orders they were to take over screening the convoy so that HOTSPUR and ISIS could hurry on to Suda Bay to get rid of the soldiers crowding their decks.*

*As soon as the newcomers were sighted, Lees signalled to Commander R. D. H. Lane in the WRYNECK to join DIAMOND in the task of picking up the survivors from the SLAMAT. For nearly an hour before, Lieutenant-Commander P. A. Cartwright, DIAMOND's captain, had called for help, reporting that he was being heavily dive-bombed and machine-gunned while carrying out his rescue work.*

*By ten o'clock, when she was joined by WRYNECK, DIAMOND had already more than 500 soldiers and seamen on board. But there were still boats and rafts near the burning ship, and in them were about fifty soldiers and a few of SLAMAT's crew. These were quickly picked up by WRYNECK. Then, after DIAMOND had torpedoed the blazing transport, the two destroyers made off at twenty-five knots to rejoin the convoy.*

*Stoker Petty Officer H. T. Davis, of H.M.S. DIAMOND . . . happened to glance up at the sun and saw a plane directly overhead. For a moment, he was uncertain whether it was friendly or not, for he knew that the skipper had asked for fighter protection. Besides, this particular plane appeared to him to have the same black-and-white wing markings as did our Hurricanes.*

*The 3-inch gun's crew close by him had spotted the plane too, and from the way they were acting Davis reckoned that it must be a Hurricane. Shading his eyes, he looked around the clear blue sky above him and saw that several more planes were circling and wheeling overhead like buzzards. All of them had the same markings on their wings. Perhaps, he thought, the R.A.F. really was in the right place at the right moment-for once!*

*Then, as he glanced instinctively up at the sun directly above him before going to sleep, he saw the Messerschmitt. It seemed to be coming straight for him. As he jumped to his feet and shouted a warning to the gun's crew, he saw the little tongues of flame spurting from the plane's wings and heard the staccato hammer of its cannons and machine-guns. Then, he threw himself flat on the deck.*

*The gun's crew never heard the plane, for it came gliding down with its engine switched off. They never heard Davis's warning either, for that matter. At least, not in time to act upon it. But Davis heard their cries as they fell wounded and dying around their gun. He heard, too, the cries and groans of the soldiers all round him as the Messerschmitt's fire raked DIAMOND's crowded decks. But those cries were soon muffled by the scream of a diving Ju.88 and the high-pitched whistle of falling bombs.*

*The first bomb did not hit the DIAMOND. It grazed her port side and burst as it struck the water. The explosion shattered her hull just forward of the upper mess deck which was crammed with 'Diggers'. Less than two hours ago, Davis had shepherded them below to drink hot cocoa and eat hunks of bread and cheese. When the bomb burst, most of them were asleep on the deck or sprawled across the mess tables, grateful for the food and thankful to be alive. The jagged chunks of metal from the destroyer's thin plating cut through those sleeping men like blunt scythes, killing them and maiming them hideously.*

*The second bomb went down into the after end of the engine-room, and the explosion brought the after mast and funnel crashing to the deck and hurled a score of soldiers overboard. Steam gushed in all directions and geysers of scalding water poured down on the wounded men and the sailors fighting to launch the Carley floats and rafts over the side.*

*Through the smoke, steam and the pitch darkness, Davis made his way blindly to the engine-room. Helped by one of the stokers left alive, he shut off No.2 and 3 boilers. Then, followed by one or two others, he climbed back on deck to find that No. 1 boiler was still trying to steam. Releasing the upper deck emergency valves and opening the hatches, he shouted to the men to come up from the boiler room.*

*DIAMOND was sinking fast by the stern with her bows rearing high out of the water. For a second, as he stood poised to jump, Davis heard another plane screaming down at his ship and saw the bombs leaving its belly turning over and over, the sun on glinting their fins as they fell. One of those bombs landed on Diamond's torpedoes.*

*WRYNECK was hit within a few seconds of DIAMOND. And like DIAMOND's, WRYNECK's crew were fooled by the friendly markings on the wings of the fighter that came gliding down out of the sun to sweep her bridge and decks with cannon and machine-gun fire. In fact, they were taken so completely by surprise that her 4-inch guns never had a chance to come into action because their crews were all killed or wounded in a matter of seconds.*

*But some of her close-range guns opened up even before the Alarm sounded on the bridge. And one of them was manned by Leading Seaman Fuller, who after being shot through the belly and thigh, kept on firing until the ship sank under him.*

*When the Alarm sounded, Mr. Waldron, the Warrant Engineer of WRYNECK, was down in his cabin. He was in his shirt sleeves for he had just finished putting a wounded Australian officer to bed in his bunk. The clatter of the Alarm synchronized with the whistle of the first bomb which exploded close alongside causing the ship to list so violently that Waldron was thrown off his feet. And the first bomb was quickly followed by a second which burst underwater on the port side abreast of Waldron's cabin. It blew in the ship's side and filled the tiny cabin with splinters of flying metal.*

*Waldron felt them ripping through his shirt and cutting deep into his back. And as he scrambled to his feet, he saw that his tattered shirt was soaked with blood. He was trying to stem the bleeding when a stick of three bombs struck the WRYNECK in quick succession. The light in the cabin flickered and went out, so that he knew that his engine-room had been hit and the dynamos wrecked. 'I'll be back for you,' he shouted over his shoulder to the wounded 'Digger' as he picked up his jacket and ran out of the cabin.*

*There was a similarity to the pattern of the Germans' attack on DIAMOND and WRYNECK, and they carried both out with such precision that they appeared to have been perfectly rehearsed. Like DIAMOND, WRYNECK had her port side forward blown in by a bomb which reduced the stokers' mess, filled with soldiers and ratings, to a shambles of dead and mutilated men. WRYNECK, too, received a direct hit in her engine-room which burst her steam pipes and wrecked her dynamos. Both ships were hit by the same number of bombs. And both sank within a few minutes of each other.*

*WRYNECK remained afloat long enough for Waldron, with the help of E. R. A. Gordine, R.N.R., to wrestle with the valves and throttles in the engine-room and finally open the emergency safety valves on deck.*

*Then, weakened to the point of collapse through loss of blood, Waldron even made time to go back to his cabin to keep his promise to the Australian. He found him lying helpless in a pool of fuel oil with his legs smashed. Putting a lifebelt on him, Waldron half dragged and half carried the soldier to the upper deck and laid him gently on a raft.*

*And then, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, WRYNECK's Engineer Officer made his way aft along the port side upper deck which was by then awash. Almost automatically, he made sure that the hatches were closed and properly secured. But the deck was slippery with fuel oil and Waldron's arms were too weak to hold him to the guard rail so that he slipped over the side. Mercifully, he just cleared the propellers thrashing wildly and uselessly at the air as WRYNECK plunged bows first under the sea.*

*Gordine followed Waldron over the side, and as he jumped he saw a Messerschmitt sweep down to machine-gun the men swimming away from the ship. In a quarter of an hour it was all over. DIAMOND and WRYNECK had sunk, and the last plane, its ammunition spent, had headed back to its base.*

*Where the destroyers had gone down a huge patch of dark brown oil spread like a pall over the blue water of the Gulf of Nauplia. And in it floated the torn corpses of the dead, wrecked and upturned boats, barks of timber, lifebelts, sodden loaves of bread, broken oars, rolled hammocks and shattered pieces of furniture. In it swam those who were still alive and those who were soon to die by drowning. Hundreds of men coated in oil. Men crying for help, coughing and retching to free their bursting lungs of the bitter crude oil that choked them. Men screaming in terror. Men praying to live. Men longing for death to release them from the agony of the burning oil seeping into their wounds. Men clutching at chunks of wreckage that slipped from their grasp. Men of high courage, who without thought for themselves, fought to save their wounded shipmates.*

*Such a man was Lieutenant-Commander Cartwright. Stoker Petty Officer Davis saw him sitting on a raft crowded to its limit with sailors from his ship. As two more ratings grabbed at the lifelines, Cartwright dived off the raft and swam quietly away.*

*There were a number of rafts and Carley floats drifting in that growing patch of oil, and few of them carried survivors. On one of them was Commander Lane of the WRYNECK, with two of his R.N.V.R. sub-lieutenants, Jackson and Griffiths, and his midshipman, Peck. Able Seaman Taylor helped to haul them on to the raft. They were all badly wounded and coated in oil. For a little while they clung to the raft. As it rolled in the rising sea, they slipped off it, too weak to hold on any longer.*

Mr. Waldron, after floating in his lifebelt for half an hour, was hauled on to a raft. Later, he was taken into WRYNECK's whaler which had been lowered soon after she was first hit. Two Carley floats were taken in tow, and the whaler continued on its slow search amongst the debris and the dead for the living. Its crew paddled around until both rafts were fully laden and until she had twenty-three men on board, including a troop sergeant-major of the Gunners and Leading Seaman Fuller.

That night when darkness fell, Waldron, Fuller and Gordine and forty-nine sailors, together with eight soldiers were all who had survived from the three ships.\*

The Navy and Army had paid dearly for SLAMAT's refusal to sail in accordance with orders."

\* Archivist's Note: One who did survive the sinking of both the Slammat and then Wryneck was George Dexter RASC; one who did not survive the sinking of the Diamond was Frank Moss RHA. Another man (soldier or sailor?) who had been onboard the Slammat at some point was named Passmore, the father-in-law of Mrs C Passmore. His circumstances are, *pro tem*, unknown.

Slamat



Positions of the sinkings

Wryneck & Diamond



HMS Diamond to the rescue of Slammat

## OVER 10,000 WERE LEFT ON THE BEACHES THE LUCKY ONES BECAME PRISONERS OF WAR

What would afterwards be referred to as 'The Greek Tragedy' had ultimately wound up with the awesome, sad spectacle of some 10,000 of our brave comrades left behind on the beaches — or scattered here, there and everywhere in small groups, straggled along those pock-marked, desperate escape routes to the sea, some fighting brave rearguard actions to the last